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JOURNAL-ISMS

3 Things That Need Fixing at the N.Y. Post

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Cartoonists "want to really get to the heart of the matter, but you don't want to construct obstacles to communication," said the Philadelphia Inquirer's Tony Auth. (Credit: Tony Auth).

Writer Says Cartoon Flap Could Be Editor's Undoing

On the morning after the New York Yankees beat the Boston Red Sox to win the 2003 American League pennant, some editions of the New York Post carried an editorial bemoaning the Bronx Bombers' loss.

"The Yankees couldn't get the job done," read the editorial.

Post Editor Col Allan blamed the snafu on a production error.

In the 2004 election season, the tabloid became a laughing stock when it trumpeted, "Kerry's Choice: Dem picks Gephardt as VP candidate."

Sen. John Kerry, that year's Democratic presidential candidate, didn't follow the Post's script. He picked Sen. John Edwards, not Rep. Richard Gephardt. Allan said the paper thought its unattributed "exclusive" information was correct.

When Journal-isms asked a Post staffer on Friday to explain how the Post could have

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published a cartoon this week that was widely taken to represent **President Obama** as a dead chimpanzee, the journalist cited those two incidents, gave verbal shrugs and said, "We've made mistakes before."

Regardless of whether one believes the cartoon deliberately portrays Obama as a monkey, which the Post denies, staffers told Journal-isms that the blunder can be traced to an autocratic management style and lack of diversity at the top. It could ultimately prove more costly than the pennant-race or vice-presidential-pick mistakes.

"The secret here and the really interesting development is **Rupert Murdoch** is not happy with this," **Michael Wolff**, author of a book on Murdoch, whose News Corp. owns the Post, said Thursday on MSNBC.

"I would say actually slightly educated speculation is he is livid. This is not what Rupert wants. This is not where he wants to be. He is actually rather a fan of Barack Obama's, plus he's positioning himself vis-a-vis this new administration, so [for] his New York Post to come along and be so out of sync, so tone deaf, so off the point, to put it mildly is going to be a problem for a lot of people there."

"So how does this end up?" host **Keith Olbermann** asked Wolff on his "Countdown" show. "Obviously, if he's upset they are not going to ignore it. Does [at] some point in the future Col Allan disappear? Is there a private apology?"

"I think he's disappeared," replied Wolff. "Col Allan is coming to the end of his run. He has spoken about his, the possibility of going back to Australia. This is part of an exit."

"I think Col has been deeply frustrated with the fact that Murdoch likes Barack Obama. That Murdoch is actually becoming in his old age rather liberal and I think he's been under a lot of pressure, Col has to toe the line, say nice things about Barack Obama. I think it exploded here. I think — I know exactly what happened. This cartoon came in. It crossed his desk. It crossed Col Allan's desk, nobody else. He looked at it and probably said, you know, I should probably send this back because this is — but he said I'm going to go with it. It was just one of those moments that an editor makes a call that's career defining."

The cartoon, drawn for the Post's Page Six gossip section by **Sean Delonas**, shows two policemen, one with a smoking gun, looking at a dead chimpanzee. One says, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill."

The resulting uproar produced protests Thursday and Friday in front of News Corp.'s headquarters, widespread commentary and a grudging, half-hearted apology from the Post in Friday editions.

A Post spokeswoman said the newspaper would not comment beyond the editorial.

NY Post Obama Cartoon Slammed By Protesters



But journalists inside and outside the Post newsroom were not shy in listing aspects of life at the Post they say led to the embarrassing turn of events.

[Protesters tell reporters why they find New York Post cartoon offensive. Click image to play. \(Credit: CBS\)](#)

- **1. Lack of newsroom diversity**

The Post does not participate in the American Society of Newspaper Editors' annual [diversity survey](#), and did not respond to a request for information on the diversity of its newsroom.

But staffers said no journalist of color had served as an editor on its Metro desk since the late **Lisa Baird** was fired in 2001. Nor are there any in top management. The

highest-ranking journalist of color is Business Editor **Jay Sherman**. There are so few that some asked Journal-isms not to identify them even in the broadest terms, because it would be easy to determine who they were.

Their relative scarcity is part of the problem, they said. "It couldn't hurt to have someone of color who is in a position to see some of the things that go into the paper prior to print," one declared, adding that white editors should also be attuned to hints of racial insensitivity.

For some, it took only a glance. Reporter **Austin Fenner**, a black journalist, said of the cartoon, "It churned my stomach when I saw it."

Sandra Guzman, a former editor of *Latina* magazine who is now a Post associate editor in its features section, sent out an e-mail to other staffers saying, "Please know that I had nothing to do with the Sean Delonas cartoon. I neither commissioned or approved it. I saw it in the paper yesterday with the rest of the world. And, I have raised my objections to management."

However, another staffer of color said the thought never occurred that the chimpanzee would be seen as representing Obama. After all, the president does not "write" legislation — the word the cartoon used — though he is identified with it, this staffer noted.

• 2. The approval process for cartoons

One staffer said a Post cartoon has to pass muster in two stages. First, one or more top editors must approve the idea, and then one or more green-lights the finished product. Unless it was brought to top editors' attention and willfully ignored, the potential danger of the chimpanzee imagery wasn't caught at either stage.

Is there enough vetting? "He has certain issues in terms of homophobia and borderline sexism," one staffer said of Delonas, indicating careful scrutiny was warranted. On the artist's end, some at other papers show their cartoons around the newsroom, testing reactions.

"The real problem is, this is a collaboration," **Tony Auth**, cartoonist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, told Journal-isms. "It's not a matter of trying to sneak something into the paper. You want powerful cartoons. You want to really get to the heart of the matter, but you don't want to construct obstacles to communication" by detracting from the point you're trying to make. Auth drew his own take on the Post controversy in Friday's *Inquirer*.

• 3. Arrogance and the wrong kind of "edginess."

"They like being on the edge a little bit, too," a staffer said of Post management. Murdoch installed Allan, known as "Col Pot" while leading the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney, Australia, as Post editor in 2001. He was "a famously brash News Corp. veteran steeped in the cutthroat London newspaper market," *Business Week* noted later. He boosted circulation as he "cut story lengths, doubled story counts, devoted more space to photos (especially color ones), and upped the Post's daily quota of sex, celebrity, and scandal," the magazine said.

Commenting on Allan's management style, a staffer said the half-hearted apology was actually progress. "What did you expect? For the Post, this is kind of a big step. The idea of a non-apology apology is such a huge move. Everything has to be read in context."

An outsider, **Rafael Olmeda**, president of *Unity: Journalists of Color*, offered this observation, which he couched as pure speculation: "They knew it was going to explode. They frankly enjoyed it, being the Post."

On the e-mail list of the National Association of Black Journalists, a former Post staffer suggested that Australians failed to spot the problem with monkey imagery because they are not as familiar with America's racial history "and they have never indicated an interest in learning about it." Current staffers agreed that good journalists learn the culture of the places they are covering.

There was this solution from the Post newsroom: "If there wasn't anyone who looked at that and thought that wasn't a problem, they need to get out of the office, interact with people of color. The obvious thing that comes to mind is a sensitivity class." They need to get out more, "and learn there's a world beyond their daily lives."

Meanwhile, the New York Association of Black Journalists, which denounced the cartoon, told the Post that the organization will not accept its money to pay for seats at NYABJ's annual scholarship dinner next Wednesday, said **Gary Anthony Ramsay**, president of the group. Post photographer **G.N. Miller** is to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award.

"We haven't actually received a check but we have informed the Post that we will not accept their money for the six people that want to come to honor G.N. Miller. We will ask them to still come as our guests. We don't want to punish Miller or his colleagues who were coming to support him," Ramsay told Journal-isms.

- **Katia Bachko**, Columbia Journalism Review: [Thoughts on the New York Post cartoon controversy from cartoonists and their editors around the country](#)
- **Steve Blow** and **James Ragland**, Dallas Morning News: [Talking Race: Did NY Post publish racist imagery with stimulus-chimpanzee cartoon?](#)
- **Tina Dupuy**, FishBowlLA: [FBLA Readers Say Monkey Cartoon 'Ain't Right'](#)
- **Alan Gardner**, Daily Cartoonist: [Sean Delonas catches flack for duplicating self](#) (June 2008)
- **Earl Ofari Hutchinson**, syndicated: [Mr. Murdoch, Is Obama Really a Chimp?](#)
- **John Legend**, Clutch magazine: [Open Letter To The New York Post](#)
- **Roland S. Martin**, Creators Syndicate: [New York Post Cartoon Is Racist and Careless](#)
- **Lenny McAllister**, theRoot.com: [Don't Protest the New York Post](#)
- **Caitlin Millat** and **Tracy Connor**, New York Daily News: [Spike Lee wants boycott of New York Post over chimpanzee cartoon](#)
- **Mary Mitchell** blog, Chicago Sun-Times: [New York Post editorial causes uproar](#)
- **Tony Norman**, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: [Don't shoot the cartoonist, fellow cowards](#)
- **David Person**, Huntsville (Ala.) Times: [Chimp cartoon and black history](#)
- **Elmer Smith**, Philadelphia Daily News: [No humor in Post cartoon](#)
- **Michael Trapdo**, Mail & Guardian, South Africa: [Obama chimpanzee cartoon is clearly racist](#)
- **Michael Wolff**, Newser.com: [Chimp Cartoon Makes Murdoch a Chump](#)

Cartoonists Treading Gingerly in Portraying Obama

"Editorial cartoonists are bending over backwards a lot these days, as they try to satirize the nation's first black president. And when they don't, the result is the kind of outcry that erupted this week after a New York Post cartoon featured a bloody chimpanzee — intentionally or unintentionally evoking racist images of the past," **Jesse Washington** wrote Friday for the Associated Press.

"The problem is, cartoonists make their living by making fun of people — especially presidents—and exaggerating their features and foibles.

"**Ted Rall**, president of the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists, said that Obama's race has affected how his colleagues do their jobs: "Without a doubt, people are stepping more gingerly. People are tiptoeing their way through this."

"Rall, who is liberal, said it's harder to take shots at Obama because he's smart, charming and handsome, 'so when you attack the personality, people suspect there's only one reason: It's gotta be his race. My conservative cartoonist friends find it very frustrating.'"



Hillary Clinton responds to a question at the CNN/Congressional Black Caucus Institute Democratic Debate in Myrtle Beach, S.C., a year ago. A new survey of journalists of color found 66 percent saying Barack Obama, right, received positive media coverage and 53 percent declaring Clinton "received a negative bias." (Credit: Edward M. Pio Roda/CNN)

Few Expect More Diversity in Top Newsroom Jobs

A survey of 552 journalists of color, sponsored by Unity: Journalists of Color, found that 81 percent "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that **President's Obama's** election will increase the coverage of "racial and cultural issues." Fifty-four percent expected that people of color will have an opportunity to cover "more high profile stories."

But only one in three expected any improvement in the number of people of color in senior newsroom positions.

The results were released Thursday in Washington, accompanied by a panel discussion on "Race & the Media" at the National Press Club.

"The lack of confidence in the journalism industry is startling," the study concluded, "with an overwhelming majority — 92% — of the respondents rating the mainstream media as not having done an adequate job in covering race relations. This can clearly be tied back to the disparity in the media industry, and the lack of diversity in our nation's newsrooms."

Among the findings:

- "According to the survey respondents, the mainstream media demonstrated a distinct bias against some candidates during the presidential campaign. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the journalists said President Barack Obama was the recipient of positive coverage from the media. A majority rated the media coverage of his running mate, Vice President **Joe Biden**, as neutral (59%); Senator **John McCain's** media coverage was equally divided between negative (34%) and neutral (35%).
- "In contrast to the male candidates, the respondents perceived a more negative media environment for the female contenders; 66% said vice presidential candidate and Alaska governor **Sarah Palin** received a negative bias and 53% said presidential candidate and now Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** received a negative bias.
- "Seventy two percent (72%) of survey respondents were critical of mainstream media indicating that they spent 'too much time' covering the Rev. **Jeremiah Wright** and President Obama controversy and 'too little time' (57%) discussing the controversy between Rev. **John Hagee** and Senator McCain."

In the Press Club discussion, there were further observations.

Chicago Tribune columnist **Clarence Page** said, "the media love to talk about race, it helps